

ALDEN HOUSE

Thursday, October 6, 1955

Auction of Alden House Antiques Saturday Angers Duxbury Folks

A canopy bed that John Alden and Priscilla made for their grandchild will be sold at auction next Saturday. With it "on the block" will be the contents of the John Alden House in Duxbury, with the exception of a few articles owned by the Alden Kindred.

Duxbury people are up in arms. They want to stop the sale and preserve those articles which thousands of visitors come to Duxbury to see each year. The Alden House and the Standish Monument are the two top historical sites of the town.

Tomorrow, Louis Cook, celebrated auctioneer, will move the contents of the John Alden House to his auction auditorium on Route 3 in Hanover. There, on Saturday, from 11 a.m. to midnight people from all over the country will gather to make their bids. Announcement of the auction was made only last Friday, too late, perhaps, for a Duxbury Citizen's committee to organize and plan any action other than to be among the bidders themselves.

Why Don't You Speak For Yourself, John?

Why? Because bones mouldering to dust through three long centuries have only the tongues of a forgetful posterity with which to speak. So today the "Scribe" of the Pilgrim Colony of Plymouth is voiceless or at best murmurs but weakly as the contents of the John Alden House are placed on the public auction block.

Truer, Louis Cook will handle these fine pieces with the reverence due all good antiques, but he will be the first to admit that in all probability these pieces, while authentic of the period, may never have met the gaze of the man and woman whose "courtship" is familiar to every American school-child.

Yet these are the furnishings which thousands of 20th century "Pilgrims" have seen and accepted as "relics" and by their presentation as such over many decades they have acquired an aura of authenticity.

The faith of the public makes a shrine, for genuineness can decay or pass unnoticed; and while it is true that the Alden House can be refurnished with reproductions, a sentient posterity must weep over the lack of national pride which is

permitting the dispersal of these household articles which have long been so intimately associated with a memorial to the birth of our nation.

If only you could speak for yourself, John! If only you could speak of that first hard winter and the heartbreak of building a home in the wilderness.

You worked and suffered to give us our town, our country, our heritage of greatness; and today there is none to give your memory the full homage you deserve.

Oh, John, if only you could speak for yourself!

With shame I submit this plea on your behalf, for my forebear William Bradford shared your pilgrimage, your hardships, and your great endeavors, yet I am unable to stop or stay this dismantling of the shrine to your memory — perhaps even the ultimate loss to the public of the house wherein you dwelt.

Perhaps 'tis well you cannot speak, John, else you might bewail the inadequate protection and preservation of a revered shrine. You might cry out, "Oh, my children, how has this come to pass?"

ISABELLE V. FREEMAN

The auction was the decision of the seven heirs of the estate of Mrs. Bessie Alden, owner of the Alden House contents, who died about five years ago. The John Alden House is owned by the Alden Kindred which has possession of only a few of the furnishings within the house. Presently occupying the Alden house are Arthur Alden, a son of the late Mrs. Bessie Alden, and his wife. They too, are none too happy over the decision of the other heirs.

When the estate was settled about two years ago, the heirs decided to sell the contents owned by Mrs. Bessie Alden. Everything was at first offered to the Alden Kindred, but the Kindred wanted only certain articles in the house. The heirs decided that all of the late Mrs. Alden's possessions should be sold piece by piece at auction.

Listed among the many articles which will be included in the auction is the canopy bed of the grandchild of John and Priscilla Alden; a mortar and pestle, used by John Alden in grinding corn and wheat; a round table owned and used by Ruth Alden, a daughter of John and Priscilla; a harmonium (wind instrument as an organ) owned by Peregrine White and presented to Charles Alden, husband of Bessie Alden, about 30 years ago; and an old John Carver chair of the 1600's.

Members of the Alden Kindred will be at Saturday's auction ready to take back to the Alden House whatever they may acquire at the auction. Regardless of their success, however, it is known today that the Alden House will somehow be re-furnished and continued in operation.

Because historical groups and antique seekers from all over the country may be represented at Saturday's auction in Hanover, the auctioneers have found it necessary to charge an admission fee to the 13-hour program.

The heirs of the estate of the late Bessie Alden are Charles L. Alden, Jr., of Wellesley, executor; Arthur W. Alden of Duxbury; Mrs. Priscilla Alden Evans of Palo Alto, Calif.; Mrs. Rachel Alden Patterson of Clearwater, Fla.; Mrs. Estner Alden Hansen of Needham, Mass.; Myles Standish Alden of Middleboro; and Miss Priscilla Alden of Washington, D. C.